



# GROUNDCOVER

## NEWS AND SOLUTIONS FROM THE GROUND UP

JULY 2015 VOLUME 6 ISSUE 7

**\$1**

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# Five years of building community and creating opportunity



by Susan Beckett  
Publisher

It has been five years since the first issue of Groundcover News – a joint July and August issue – hit the streets just before Art Fair. In those short five years, we and the Water Hill Music Festival now help define what makes Ann Arbor special.

Hundreds of people have contributed to the 58 ensuing editions and dozens have helped out in the office. Dozens more have assisted in sundry ways ranging from assisting vendors with skill development and winter wear to providing food. Interns from Albion College, the University of Michigan, Community High, Rudolph Steiner School and Greenhills School

forwarded our progress by assisting with business plan development, connecting vendors with services and selling opportunities, pursuing grants, developing social media and other marketing campaigns, writing and editing articles and staffing the office.

The Washtenaw County community purchased 300,000 monthly one-dollar issues of Groundcover News and over 6,500 of our semi-annual special editions that sell for \$10 apiece. Our first year we sold 23,000 copies; this year, 98,000. During that time span, 270 vendors have sold Groundcover News. Of the initial 25, five are still actively selling, higher than our average retention rate of 14 percent. And four of those five are now housed.

While we have a cadre of regularly contributing writers, we get many one-time submissions from readers who have something important they want to share with their neighbors. Our features ranged from a primer on transgender etiquette to exposés on the criminal justice system. We have profiled 55 non-profit and government agencies around the county who provide services to the low-income community. Interviews featured sports figures like University of Michigan basketball forward Jordan Morgan, community members like super-volunteer Bob Milstein, and many of the people who sell Groundcover.

Our readers are diverse and the strong opinions expressed by one can deeply offend another. More than once we have received angry communications letting us know that an opinion, usually one that contains references to political parties, has alienated a reader who intends to no longer purchase Groundcover News.

## GROUNDCOVER

### MISSION:

*Creating opportunity and a voice for low-income people while taking action to end homelessness and poverty.*

Susan Beckett, Publisher  
[contact@groundcovernews.com](mailto:contact@groundcovernews.com)

Lee Alexander, Editor  
[c.lee@groundcovernews.com](mailto:c.lee@groundcovernews.com)

Andrew Nixon, Associate Editor

### Contributors

Liz Bauman

Martha Brunell

Keta Cowan

Janella FaAola

Elizabeth Kurtz

Alice Newell

Alana LeBron

William Lopez

Angie Martell

Martin Stolzenberg

Letters to the Editor:  
[editor@groundcovernews.com](mailto:editor@groundcovernews.com)

Story or Photo Submissions:  
[submissions@groundcovernews.com](mailto:submissions@groundcovernews.com)

Advertising:  
[contact@groundcovernews.com](mailto:contact@groundcovernews.com)

[www.groundcovernews.org](http://www.groundcovernews.org)

[facebook.com/groundcover](http://facebook.com/groundcover)  
423 S. 4th Ave, Ann Arbor  
734-707-9210

More interesting to me is the number of readers who have probably been miffed but continue to buy and read Groundcover anyway. It is a testament to their deep empathy for our vendors and broad-mindedness that they can disagree with the message, even vehemently, but not reject the messenger.

We are deeply grateful to the pioneering volunteers – including Laurie Lounsbury (our first editor), Sandy, Marquise Williams and David – board members, and vendors – especially Miriam, Rissa and Tony – who put us on their backs and carried us into your lives. Several organizations also played critical roles in our establishment and outreach: St. Andrew's Episcopal Church (our first distribution spot), Bethlehem United Church of Christ (the site of our first and current office space), the Vineyard Church Friday night outreach at Liberty Park (or Pizza in the Park, as we call it), and the Hunger Meal at First Baptist Church of Ann Arbor.

It was impetus from religious community that got us started and their support that has helped us thrive. Our established vendors have meaningful relationships with the attendees of the religious institutions at which they sell Groundcover. The parishioners at St. Francis alone purchase some 300 copies on a single Sunday each month. The St. Mary's Student Parish worshippers began several years ago outfitting the vendors who sold to them with outerwear for winter, and for the last couple of years extended that to fundraising and soliciting Running Fit and others to obtain donated and discounted gloves, hats, and neck warmers for all active Groundcover vendors.

## Tiny houses as solution to rent

As a follow-up to the April article on accessory dwelling units (ADUs), I wanted to share the good news that Ann Arbor has taken an important step forward to making affordable housing a reality. As converted basements, carriage houses, or tiny houses, ADUs are a great way of providing affordable rental units, but are currently illegal under current zoning regulations.

On May 19, Ann Arbor City Council officially allocated funding in the 2015-2016 City Budget to hire a consultant to identify the best way to legalize ADUs in Ann Arbor. I want to thank everyone who helped make affordable housing a priority for City Council by spreading the word, attending City Council meetings, and speaking with Council Members. We couldn't have done it without you!

However, the struggle to create affordable housing continues! Over the next couple months, the City of Ann Arbor will hold public meetings on the specifics of legalizing ADUs. We need affordable housing supporters to attend these meetings and share their support for rules that make it easy to convert and rent ADUs. If we don't speak up, we know the skeptics and naysayers will!

For more information feel free to visit us at [www.facebook.com/AffordableHousingNowAnnArbor](http://www.facebook.com/AffordableHousingNowAnnArbor)

Together we can help make an Ann Arbor a community where everyone can afford to live here!

– Luke Norman, Affordable Housing Now Ann Arbor

Local businesses have supported us with advertising and hospitality. The People's Food Co-op was our first year-long advertiser, taking a chance on us after only six months. The Co-op and its member-shoppers have been consistent and generous supporters ever since and have played a big part in our continued growth. Elmos T-Shirts owner Elmo Morales has personally helped out every Groundcover News vendor, offering encouragement and advice and making them a custom Groundcover shirt on their very first day. Elmo determined these were needed – after donating the initial 25 vendor aprons we had ordered – and stepped up to provide them himself when informed that we didn't have the funds to meet that kind of demand. He has followed through to this day and even made special t-shirts for our delegation to wear to the International Network of Street Papers conference.

And of course, you – our readers – are irreplaceable. The conversations you have with Groundcover vendors are often the highlights of their day. Even in the sub-zero temperatures and whipping wind, so many of you stop, take a moment to offer a word of encouragement and expose your bare hand as you trade a bill for a paper.

It has always been our intention to be an organization that builds community across economic, political and ethnic divides. Thanks to you, and to your commitment to being more than the labels that identify you, we have accomplished that together.

From all of us at Groundcover News, thank you!

## Letter to Editor

Per the GOP's "war on children" [letter to the editor in the June issue], Groundcover's primary mission should be to advance the cause for the homeless. Printing political views, especially toxic articles that demonize one end of the political spectrum, has no place in this forum. All parties want to provide a safety net. They just don't agree on how wide the safety net should extend and how comfortable that net should be. All parties can share the blame for societal problems, and all should be invited to the table to come up with solutions. Demonizing, name-calling, finger-pointing does nothing for the cause. Please think before you print.

Thanks,  
Tom

## Laughter, anyone?



by Rev. Dr. Martha  
Brunell  
Groundcover  
Contributor

I have favorite quotes everywhere – in notebooks from classes I have taught, in computer and paper files, in my memory bank, on pieces of scratch paper, on refrigerator magnets, on napkins in the glove box, and on the backs of receipts I don't think I need to save for my taxes. At times I can easily retrieve a quote I partially recall. There are moments, too, when I have to mount a search to locate the quote in question.

I recently came across a new quote that has a firm grip on my attention. These words are from film actress, director, and producer Salma Hayek: "People often say that 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder,' and I say that the most liberating thing about beauty is realizing that you are the beholder. This empowers us to find beauty in places where others have not dared to look, including inside ourselves."

Ever since I was a small child, I've been aware of an internal spark I feel if I am with someone or watching someone who acts or speaks from a place of everyday love and care. What I observe outwardly is often not particularly remarkable. It is the spirit in which it happens. Reflecting on Hayek's words, I behold simple beauty in an easily overlooked place. I beheld that kind of beauty earlier this week in a routine meeting of a fellowship group at the church where I serve.

This group gathers six times a year and has developed an engaging blend of good food, learning, service in the broader world, retreat time, celebration, and welcome. Program leaders come both from outside and from within the group. Across the year every meeting is in a different location, occasionally

at church or a restaurant, but most often in someone's home. Furniture is rearranged to create table space for everyone. The day's program follows a reliably excellent meal. This time it was a program on laughter.

The presenter, a retired social worker and member of the group, is especially interested in the link between our humor and our health. She had just the right combination of research data on stress, immune systems, endorphins, blood pressure and the like, peppered with stories from her own life.

At the end of her prepared remarks, she didn't invite us into organized sharing. But after she handed everyone a page from a desk-top Maxine calendar, stories and comments slowly started to rise and flow. The room filled up with smiles, giggles, and bursts of laughter. Our common ground of vulnerability, tenderness, remembrance and even the ridiculous was infectious, holy and beautiful. We took time to linger together, to reveal pieces of who we are or have been, to listen well, to contribute our unique lightness of humor and to add to the texture that connects us. The root word for humor is the same as the root for humus or soil and for humans. Humor is the very ground of who we are.

As the pastor in this crowd, I knew one person in the room who was facing a harder transition than she expected in downsizing from a home to an apartment. There was another whose plate was full with family struggles. A third was concerned about a niece who survived the 2012 theater shooting in Aurora, Colorado and who will be testifying soon in the trial. A fourth faces almost daily heartbreak with constant health crises for her 90-year-old parents. No one was exempt from reasons for sadness or worry. The room could easily have been saturated with heaviness. But one of us loved laughter and invited the rest of us to be present to its lilting beauty within us and among us. What a gift it was!

## Note left in Tony's shoe

*(Left with no alternative in early spring, Tony was sleeping under a bridge. He awoke to find the following note and a \$5 bill in his shoe.)*

*I left you some money. I just wanted to say that you are great. You are a fantastic person. You can do anything. The thing about life is you are always at a crossroad when you want to be. Anything is possible with drive.*

*If you have a dream, fight for it, and even if you don't have a dream, you just have to keep dreaming and you'll find one. I know things are more than hard for someone without a home, but you can always find strangers that care, even when they are hard to find. (Especially in this day and age.) Just know that my heart goes out to you, and that I hope you find happiness wherever you are.*

*Have a wonderful life!*



**HOUSING ACCESS  
for WASHTENAW  
COUNTY (HAWC)**

**734-961-1999**

**MONDAY – FRIDAY 8:30am – 5pm**

### Who Should Call?

Anyone who has a housing question, need issue, or concern.

### What you may receive:

- ✓ Shelter
- ✓ Housing
- ✓ Information and referral(s) to housing and services
- ✓ Housing related financial assistance
- ✓ Landlord links
- ✓ Education to obtain and sustain housing

### Please Note:

All shelters in Washtenaw County are filled by HAWC.

### How HAWC Works?

#### Step #1

Call HAWC with your housing question

#### Step #2

A HAWC Intake Specialist will ask you some questions about your housing situation

#### Step #3

You will be provided with the appropriate assistance, information, resource and/or referral to address your housing need based on eligibility

**HAWC is a program of The Salvation Army** in Washtenaw County in partnership with Interfaith Hospitality Network at Alpha House, The Shelter Association of Washtenaw County, SOS, Housing Bureau for Seniors, Ozone House, Michigan Ability Partners, SafeHouse Center, Washtenaw County OCED, and the Washtenaw Housing Alliance.

# AGENCY SPOTLIGHT

## The Washtenaw County ID


**WASHTENAW COUNTY**

**Jane Q Sample**  
12345 Any Street  
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

DOB: 12/05/1983  
Height: 5'8" Eyes: Brown  
ISS: 05/15/2015  
EXP: 05/14/2018  
ID#:



*Jane Q Sample*

**IDENTIFICATION CARD**

by William Lopez, Alana LeBrón,  
Janelle Fa'Aola, & Keta Cowan  
U-M Student Contributors

Wesley, an African-American man in his late 50s, was discharged from prison about a month ago. Unable to return to his previous home, Wesley moved every few days, sleeping in abandoned buildings, homeless shelters and on the street.

For Wesley and people facing similar struggles, assistance from social or governmental agencies can sometimes be critical in avoiding crisis and for facilitating reintegration, employment and a stable home. But for many, the lack of a State ID or driver's license can serve as an insurmountable barrier to accessing much-needed resources.

Wesley was one of over 300 applicants for the Washtenaw County ID Card, a photo identification card available to all individuals living in Washtenaw County that can be used to establish identity and residence. To receive an ID card, applicants must fulfill two criteria. First, they must establish their identity, and second, they must show proof of current residency in Washtenaw County.

The ID functions on a "point" system in which an applicant must reach 300 points to prove their identities and demonstrate residence in order to attain an ID. There are many ways in which an applicant can get these points, with a full description on the ID Project's website ([www.washtenawid.com/how-to-get-it](http://www.washtenawid.com/how-to-get-it)). Essen-

tially, however, applicants must provide a document or ID that has their name, photograph and date of birth (this can include passports, IDs from schools, employers, the Department of Corrections, and others) and another "identity credential" (this can include a tax return, a criminal complaint or summons, W4 or W2 tax form, pay stub, baptismal records, and even an Affidavit of Identifying Witness, in which a witness with a photo ID confirms the applicant's identity). The applicant, lastly, must provide proof of residence in Washtenaw County in the last 30 days (this can include a utility bill, bank statement, or letter from a social service organization or homeless shelter).

We asked Wesley what he planned to do with his Washtenaw ID. He, like many other applicants, listed activities that many with a State ID or Driver's License take for granted: applying for school, looking for a job, finding housing, using the library, seeking social services, getting medications from a pharmacy, and seeking out resources for the children in his life. Other applicants additionally planned to use the Washtenaw ID to cash a check, identify oneself with police or immigration officials, or pick their children up from school.

Wesley's story is not uncommon. In fact, it's not only homeless individu-

als who must confront challenges due to lack of accepted identification. The Washtenaw ID Project further aims to specifically support the chronically mentally ill (who may have lost paperwork transitioning through institutions), the undocumented (who are not eligible for driver's licenses or State IDs), older African Americans (who may not have proof of identity), and transgender individuals (whose presentation may not match the designation on their IDs).

And of course, even those who have licenses or State IDs can apply for a Washtenaw ID.

With a critical mass of Washtenaw IDs in circulation, the card will be transformed from a marker of need to a sign of community solidarity with the most marginalized members of Washtenaw County.

*For more information about the Washtenaw ID, call (734) 340-5898 or email [admin@washtenawid.com](mailto:admin@washtenawid.com).*

### "Why did you decide to get a County ID?"

- Because an ID is a very important document to prove who I am
- I need an ID for everyday life
- It is important for all of us to recognize all of us in our community
- To stand in solidarity with others
- I have no sufficient identification at all except for a prison ID
- To stand as one community with all of our neighbors!
- In case the police stop me
- To have a sense of belonging – in solidarity with our most vulnerable communities
- Everywhere you go, ID is the first thing they ask for and now we can use an ID card that is not expired
- To be able to pick up medications



### Bethlehem United Church of Christ

423 S. Fourth Avenue, Ann Arbor, MI 48104

734-665-6149

*Bethlehem Church is the home of the Groundcover office*

#### Sunday Worship Times

8:30 am and 10:00 am

Summer Sunday school at 10:15 am

Fellowship Hour follows each service

#### Come see us during the Ann Arbor Art Fair!

July 15-18 – Art Fair Parking at Bethlehem Church

8 am – 7 pm Wednesday, Thursday & Friday

8 am – 4pm on Saturday

All proceeds benefit the Bethlehem Youth Program.

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[www.youtube.com/user/BethlehemChurchA2](http://www.youtube.com/user/BethlehemChurchA2)



# MOVING FORWARD

## Empowerment – the healing journey of finding and living your truth

by Angie Martell  
Groundcover Contributor

Throughout my life, I have wondered what empowerment was. For a long time, I believed that empowerment was the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions or outcomes. But empowerment is more than that. Empowerment isn't controlling the other or having your own way. It isn't living in the world of should, ought to, need to, have to, or must.

Empowerment is living your truth with an open heart—whatever that may be to you. It means finding the strength, the endurance and the love to face any challenge that life brings you, and to use it to expand your understanding of and compassion for yourself and for humanity. True empowerment comes when we live our truth, speak our truth, rid ourselves of our self-imposed fears, and believe in and love ourselves for the truly splendid people we are.

Each of us has a sacred nature and incredible powers. Yet, we refuse to believe in ourselves – we secretly feel unworthy of the great gifts of love, wisdom and abundance, and sometimes we feel our souls dimmed and our spirit lost. We often lose ourselves in a sea of negativity and despair, especially when we feel that conflict is all around us.

### Conflict as an opportunity for change

Let's be honest: conflict is unavoidable and, as a sign of the need for change, it can provide us with an opportunity for growth, new understanding, and improved communication. Yet, we have been taught to dread conflict, to resist and avoid

conflict, and to win rather than seek common ground.

When we are in conflict we sometimes fail to look at what triggered the conflict. It is no coincidence that the people closest to us – our spouses, our children, our parents and our colleagues – are our greatest triggers. So when in conflict, ask yourself the following: who are you angry at, what are you not getting, what are you afraid of losing, is your conflict or anger exaggerated, are you feeding your internal negative prompters, how can the conflict be resolved? Remember, change the idea of a thing and you change the thing.

Conflicts and problems are not going away until you take responsibility for them and decide how you will divert the negative energy and inject positive energy, and find balance and harmony in your life.

As a holistic lawyer, I am aware that many clients have experienced and suffered profound traumas in their lives. It is estimated that more than 70 percent of the population will experience one or more traumatic incidents in their lives. Some people relive these traumas over and over, causing them to lose connection with their true selves and remain bound to these past traumas. Instead of transforming these wounds into sources of wisdom and strength, they remain in the pain of the trauma.

Holistic law is about asking people to stop, listen, remove the internal negative prompters, be open – to face their fears and be willing to step into the shoes of the other and see the perspective from their side – and find the healing and peace within ourselves that leads to forgiveness.

In this way, you can find your own solutions. One solution might be stopping the tape in our minds from replaying past mistakes over and over in our head, so that we can focus more of our energies on moving forward. Negative internal dialogue is another common culprit. If everyone channeled the energy that is created from complaining about what is not working to positive thoughts and intentions, we would see a great deal of positive change on the planet. Finally, we may also need to develop new ways of thinking and keep that thinking in alignment with our vision for what we want to create in our lives.

In situations involving others, we need to move away from the drama triangles of victim/perpetrator/rescuer and create an empowerment triangle of creator/challenger/coach. If we look at a problem from the point of view of victim and perpetrator, we remained trapped in that mindset instead of seeing ourselves as powerful creators of our own destinies. If we look at a problem or conflict as needing a "rescuer," we rob ourselves of our ability to

see the problem as a challenge that we can, with the help of others, not only creatively overcome together but also heal and grow from.

### Finding and living your truth

It's who you become, not what you do, that changes the world. What are you passionate about? What gives you great joy to do? Are you being authentic to your inner truth – are your thoughts and actions are in alignment? Are you doing things because you "ought to," because you need to, or because you desire to? Who are you – what are your gifts, strengths, and belief systems? Do you bring honesty, integrity, and compassion into your personal and business relationships? Do you use your creativity to envision a happy and healthy life? Are you keeping your power or do you give it away by allowing other people to define reality?

I believe that anything is possible and our thoughts create the world we live in. What would your life be like if you could stop fighting what you came here to learn and do, and instead welcomed and celebrated it?

The life you lead is about the choices you make. I believe that we are at the end of a dysfunctional cycle of human consciousness and it is time to change. As Ghandi said, "You must be the change you want to see in the world" – because if you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change.



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At the Y, we exist to strengthen community. Together with people like you, we nurture the potential of kids, help people improve their health, and provide opportunities to support our neighbors. So join our cause. And create meaningful change not just for your family, but also for your community.



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Ann Arbor, Michigan 48103  
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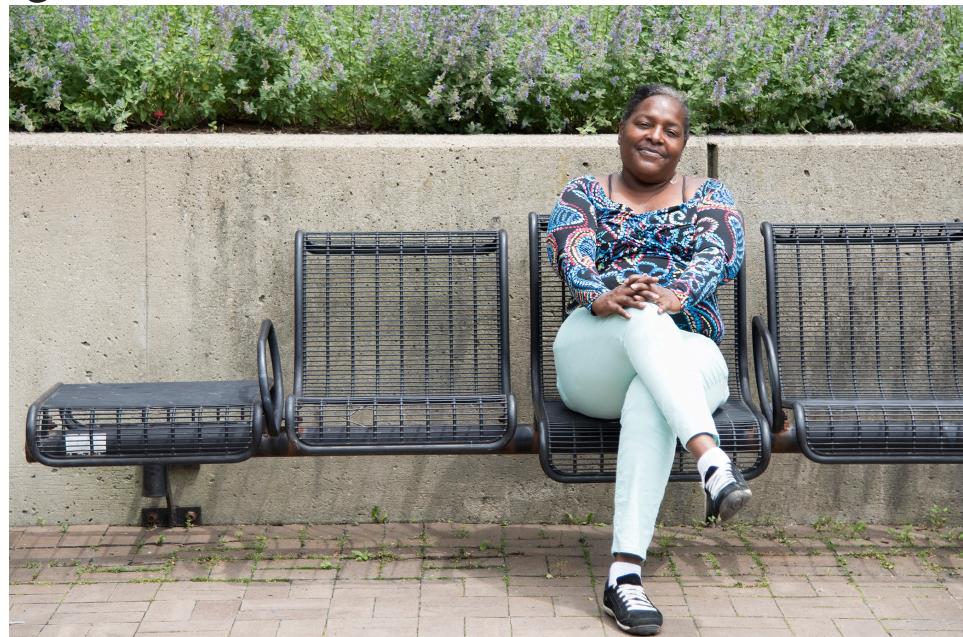
## Family matters brought Felicia, Vendor #234, to Groundcover

by Susan Beckett

Mama Felicia never intended to return to Michigan for more than a visit. But when her daughter was severely injured in a robbery in Detroit in September of 2014, she dropped her life in Florida and high-tailed it here to care for her daughter and grandchild.

Her daughter, recently graduated from college, had come to Detroit to introduce her 8-month-old baby to his great-grandmother and many aunts, uncles and cousins. She ran out of gas after dropping a friend at home so she and a cousin walked to a gas station. On the way back, they were attacked at the corner of Puritan and Waverly. The cousin was shot in the knee and Felicia's daughter took three bullets in the back. One grazed her heart, one hit a lung and the third is still lodged near her spine. She coded twice, suffered a stroke on her right side that affected her memory, both lungs collapsed and she needed 27 bags of blood – but she survived.

After months of care, she was recovering and Felicia moved to Ann Arbor where she could help a cousin with transportation and still visit her daughter weekly. She found odd jobs, including cutting and styling the hair of acquaintances. She heard about Groundcover News and started selling it as another source of income. She sought services at the Delonis Center but opted not to stay there, preferring a tent on her own, since she is a very light sleeper whose back pain makes it difficult for her to fall asleep. Her YMCA membership, at a scholarship



**Felicia rarely rests as she cares for her daughter and grandson between cutting hair, selling Groundcover News and doing odd jobs.**

rate, enabled her to do the stretching she needs for her back and shower regularly.

Given her past, it is easy to see why she is vigilant, even at rest. Her early years were dominated by fear that her father, who had abused her mother, would kidnap her and her siblings. She recalls that, in those years, her mother always dressed all five of them in blue shirts, blue pants, blue socks and brown shoes so it would be easy to describe what they were wearing to the police in the event that he took them.

When she was four, her father showed up at their doorstep and was shot to death by her mother. Later that year, Felicia was accosted in the bathroom of her Headstart classroom by the man

known then as "the Detroit rapist." Her screams scared him away.

Resilient, Felicia graduated from Redford High School craving adventure. Felicia has been married and divorced twice and is determined that neither she nor her daughter will be dependent on a man.

She left Detroit at the age of 23 and lived for years in California where she bartered with a friend from Africa whom she taught to drive in exchange for lessons on braiding hair. Felicia learned she could braid fastest when she closed her eyes.

"A blind man has more agility," she claims.

Felicia lived briefly in Las Vegas and in Georgia where she was the head cook at a convalescent home. In 2003, she moved back to Detroit where she acquired a Dollar Store – which evolved into a thrift store – and seven houses, most of which she rented out. Disgusted with the high property taxes, crime and difficulty in getting good tenants, she walked away from all of them in 2012. Felicia settled in Florida where she refurbished and managed a Tune and Lube gas station and market in Apopka.

Felicia enjoys the challenge of selling Groundcover News and the opportunity to make people smile every day. She embraced the challenge of establishing new sales areas in Pittsfield Township and sold regularly at the exit of the Kroger on Carpenter Rd.

"If I see someone holding a paper, I sing, 'My paper's better than your paper, my paper's better than yours...' I like to see people happy. No matter what problems I am going through, I try to be happy," Felicia says.

Felicia is saving up her money so she and her daughter and grandchild can relocate someplace safe and warm come fall.

"Don't look past the person. It costs nothing to give a smile. It is our job every day to give love, show love and receive love" – this is the philosophy Felicia has developed in life and in selling Groundcover News.

## Discover What MOVES You!

### New 2<sup>nd</sup> Location!

Now experience ONE great Kiwanis Thrift Sale at TWO Ann Arbor expanded locations!

Discover more great deals on tons of unique merchandise. And every purchase helps us help kids!

\*Items shown are representative of typical sale items, not actual inventory.



**Kiwanis**  
Thrift Sale

[www.02kiwanis.org](http://www.02kiwanis.org)

Kiwanis Thrift Sale Downtown  
Saturdays, 9am-12pm  
Washington at First St.

Kiwanis Thrift Sale West  
Saturdays, 10am-1pm  
100 N. Staebler Rd. at W. Jackson Rd.



**St. Francis of Assisi**  
PARISH

A Proud supporter of Groundcover News

Jesus said to Thomas, "Have you come to believe because you have seen me?"

Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

(John 20:29)

### Mass Schedule

**Saturday**

5:00 p.m.

**Sunday**

7:00 a.m. 8:45 a.m. 10:30 a.m. & 12:15 p.m.

St Francis of Assisi Parish  
2250 East Stadium Blvd.  
Ann Arbor, MI 48104  
(734) 769-2550  
[www.stfrancisa2.com](http://www.stfrancisa2.com)

## Overcoming Empire: A User's Guide to Personal and Global Revolution

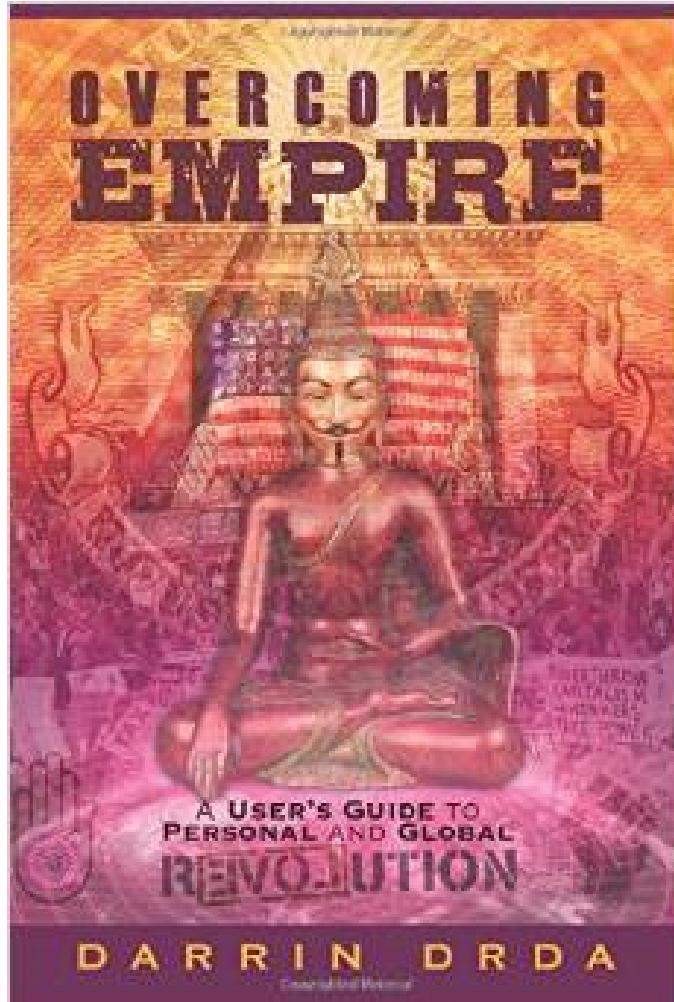
by Darrin Drda  
Review by Andrew Nixon  
Associate Editor

*Given that most people are aware of the drastic changes that need to be made in our lives and our institutions, why don't we make them?*

This perennially vexing question, posed by the author early in the book's preface, hovers at the back of the mind, if not on the tip of the tongue, of virtually anyone who has been paying the least bit of attention to the state of the world. Many of us, seeing the growing disparity between the haves and the have-nots, the escalating political destabilization occurring throughout the world and the rising sirens of ecological distress, have tried to do our own small part to counteract these trends – perhaps choosing to shop more locally, purchase fair-trade coffee or organic lettuce, sign online petitions supporting noble causes or buy a copy of *Groundcover News* from time to time.

Those who haven't tried to play their part – well, who can blame them, when the odds seem stacked so hopelessly against us? Increasingly, it seems that the main thing *we the people* have in common is a growing recognition that, however noble our intentions and actions may be, in the final analysis Big Change lies beyond our personal reach. Perhaps throwing up our hands, tuning out the ever-dismaying headlines, and focusing on our only apparent sphere of influence – our private lives – is the only sane response to the insanity we see all around us.

But perhaps not. In his latest book, *Overcoming Empire: A User's Guide to Personal and Global Revolution*, Darrin Drda offers a compelling alternative to collective despair. It is an astonishingly lucid, well-researched, and comprehensive analysis of the dynamics underlying our dysfunc-



tional political-economic system, taking the reader step-by-step through both the problem and its solution.

Countering former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's assertion that "There Is No Alternative" (aka, "TINA") to the Western world's current economic ideology, Drda asserts that "a fundamental transformation in the structure of our society and institutions, and our basic assumptions about life, is not just possible but inevitable."

These are easy words for anyone to proclaim, but Drda then dedicates the following 275 pages – the culmination of a life's work contemplating these issues – to systematically dismantling the myths that serve to perpetuate what he refers to as "The Empire Machine" – a Military-Corporate-Media-Education-Medical-Prison

Complex, running largely on automatic, that "knows only quantity and runs according to a single principle: *more...* [and] is essentially programmed to destroy life on earth."

No one, including those in power – the notorious "1 percent" – is being served by the Machine, Drda argues, "because it is incapable of delivering anything that a normal human being needs to be truly happy."

While this book focuses on exposing the warped workings of the system itself and the practical actions we as individuals can take to dismantle the Machine, its central message is a spiritual one. Drda believes that humanity is being

forced by its own hand to ask anew the ages-old question: *What does it mean to be human?*

By simply giving in and going along, we risk "becoming mere automata – robotic entities running on destructive programs that are not of our own conscious choosing. In short, we face the risk of losing our souls." The Empire Machine's end-game is to make machines of us all – unquestioning, soulless consumers of resources – with the foregone conclusion of collective self-destruction.

The alternative, he says – and our only realistic hope – is to participate in what eco-theologian Thomas Berry called "The Great Work" of our age: as Drda puts it, the "single, unifying task... of turning our species from a destructive force on planet Earth to a benign or mutually enhancing presence."

Our dominant cultural story, he points out, assumes a fundamental separation between humans and the nonhuman world. Everything occurs within a larger context. Lacking a living sense of our connectedness to the whole of nature, we have lost sight of our place in nature:

As the light of our cities drowns out that of the stars, we are losing our connection to the natural world, to our myths, to our guiding principles and our sense of direction. Shorn of our stories and our histories, we are losing our sense of belonging in the universe, our sense of meaning beyond that of satisfying artificially created urges.

Everything about the Empire Machine wafts of this disconnection from nature. It is even built into our economic accounting models, which treat ecosystem goods and services as mere commodities, rather than the system of natural constraints within which all human activity operates. The upshot of basing policies and prices on the "single

see **EMPIRE**, page 8

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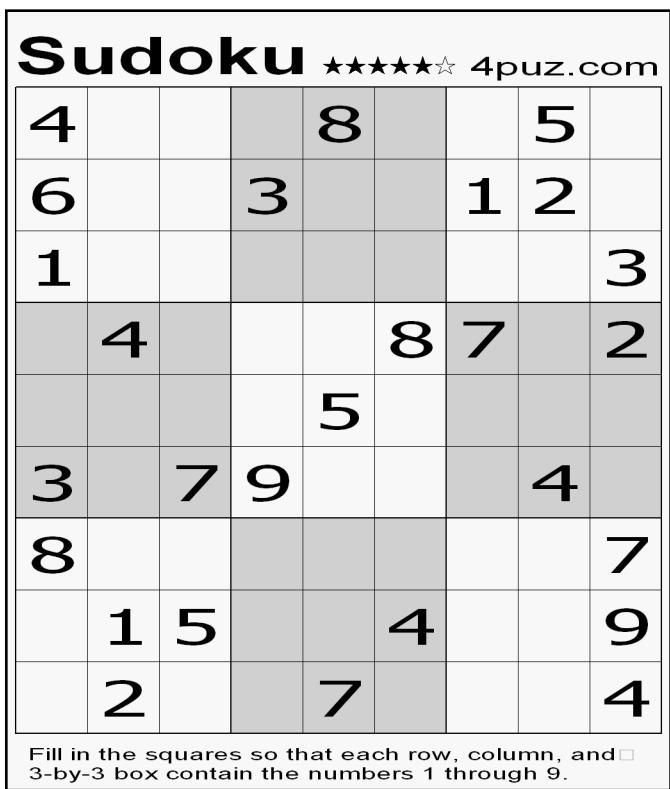
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 FOHUCVOW UCFU VP  
 YIFDUVBDM, BNJ YIFDUH  
 VP WNS'P CFOSJVUVOW.  
 – JFMKC ZFMSN IRIJPNO

Clue: Ω = Ξ

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- I will wear and display my badge when selling papers.
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 29. Panatelas  
 30. African fly  
 31. Ancient garments  
 33. Village in Ecuador  
 34. Refined one  
 35. Inclined plane  
 36. Mideastern ruler  
 37. Deplane

Puzzle by Jeff Richmond

## Overcoming Empire: A User's Guide

continued from page 7

bottom-line” of monetary profit is that the social and ecological costs of doing business get systematically ignored.

To put this in perspective, a report from the 2013 Business for the Environment Summit in New Delhi calculated an annual \$7.3 *trillion* cost to natural capital, including “financial risk from environmental externalities such as damages from climate change, pollution, land conversion and depletion of natural resources, across business sectors at a regional level.” That’s \$7.3 trillion *each year* that doesn’t get factored into virtually any company’s fiscal reports or any nation’s GDP. And yet, business continues as though these costs don’t exist – virtually guaranteeing that business-as-usual can only lead to one thing: collapse.

Therefore, Drda argues, “the natural world must become our primary reference, the sphere upon which we base not only our economy, but all of our activity. Our institutions, too, must be restructured and realigned with an understanding that the Earth is primary and everything else is derivative, including us.”

This review only hints at the wealth of insight contained in *Overcoming Empire*. In my opinion it is one of the most compelling and readable books yet published exploring the global crisis and how we – as individuals and as a people – might effectively respond to it. In making his case for “personal and global revolution,” Drda achieves a coherent synthesis drawing on leading-edge thinking from an astounding range of fields, including political science, ecology and sustainable systems theory, human biology, ancient philosophy, humanistic and Buddhist psychology and the wisdom of indigenous cultures.

Having researched and written about these topics myself for many years, I am tremendously grateful to have discovered this book: for the first time since the woeful state of the world dawned on my consciousness, I can see, in detail, a hopeful way forward for human society. I can join Mr. Drda in saying, with newfound optimism: “May we all step joyfully into this role of working side by side for the benefit and liberation of all beings, so that someday our children’s children may in turn step joyfully into a more beautiful, happy, peaceful, and loving world.”

## State cuts to reduce community mental health services

Dramatic losses in state funding have put Washtenaw County officials in the position of cutting safety net mental health services. In jeopardy is the policy and culture developed between the County's Community Mental Health (CMH) programs administered through Community Support and Treatment Services (CSTS) and the soon to be restructured Washtenaw Community Health Organization (WCHO), which have consistently provided comprehensive safety net mental health services to all in the county who needed them.

"There are two main complicating factors that will impact mental health care in this and every other county in the state," said Trish Cortes, Director of CSTS in Washtenaw County. "First is the state reduction, which has limited the general funds available for community-based mental health services. Since 2013, general funds have decreased by approximately \$3.5 million – over a 40 percent reduction. State general funds have historically allowed the CMH to provide stabilizing services not covered by health insurance plans. The ability to do this no longer exists, with the exception of helping those with the most severe disabilities, and those presenting with urgent or emergent needs."

"Second are the limitations that commercial insurance providers put on health care services, putting limits on the number of visits and support for

those with mental health needs. When someone on commercial insurance runs out of benefits but still requires mental health services, they come to us, but with the major cut in state funds, we're losing the ability to support them," Cortes added.

"It's devastating," said Sally O'Neal, Interim Director of WCHO. "We are starting to turn away people who we've served for years with case management and support services. Once those services are gone, we'll see them again, but when they are in crisis," O'Neal said.

"Take, for example, the individuals who have been stable on injectable medications for years," she said. "We also provide case management for those individuals. Once CSTS no longer has the funding to provide these services, we're likely to see them, or people like them, in emergency rooms, homeless, or even in jails. Cutting the funding that covers case management, the bread and butter of Community Mental Health, means that all we'll be able to do is react to crisis after crisis."

Felicia Brabec, Chair of the Washtenaw County Board of Commissioners, is concerned about diminishing services

to residents and long-term costs for the community. "The general fund cuts are detrimental for our residents with serious needs, and for our community at large. The State needs to step in and correct this course before the costs become too great for both our most vulnerable residents and our entire community," Brabec said.

Cortes and O'Neal said that both programs are now operating at bare-bones levels. "We haven't stopped providing general fund services, but we will run out of funding before the end of the year,

leaving us only able to serve Medicaid-covered individuals, and only able to respond to crises for the rest," Cortes said. "Barring additional resources, the availability of Community Mental Health services will diminish."

This shows up as a problem when a person who receives medication from CSTS but no longer qualifies for case

management encounters a medication-related problem and has no one to turn to for assistance in resolving it. For instance, transportation might be unavailable when a refill is urgently needed, or additional stressors lead to anxiety that requires counseling or a change in medication but the client has no one to talk with about what is going on.

Although the State Senate recommended restoring \$4.8 million in funding to meet the mental health needs of those not eligible for Medicaid or the Healthy Michigan Plan, the legislature did not do so. Affected people include those who are not residents of Michigan and anyone whose income exceeds 133 percent of the poverty level (\$33,000 for a family of four). Michigan is now one of the 10 states with the highest prevalence of mental illness combined with the lowest access to care, according to Mental Health America (MHA). While only 3.6 percent of Michiganders with a mental illness reported being uninsured, 22.6 percent said that they had mental health care needs that were not being met.

The legislature has the power to restore funding and will do so if constituents demand it.



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Contemporary Worship with Holy Communion • 11:00am



## The United States: a paradoxical nation

by Martin Stolzenberg  
Groundcover Contributor

I was in a National Guard unit in the early 1960s, with mostly African-Americans and a sprinkling of white soldiers. (How I came to be in that unit is another story.) One July 4<sup>th</sup>, we were going to march in a parade. I arrived early at our Armory in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. Grousing that we had to give up our holiday, we dressed in our woeful version of “spit-and-polished” uniforms.

After passing inspection, we were trucked over to the Grand Army Plaza. This is a wide oval that opens on to the picturesque Prospect Park in Brooklyn. We then lined up with many other units and started to parade up Eastern Parkway, a magnificent boulevard – the Champs-Élysées of Brooklyn. We were there to honor our country.

Our unit stood out among the many that made up the parade. This was mostly because of our drum major. He was big, about six-foot-six, and appeared even larger due to the enormous white drum-major head gear. He also carried and twirled a huge baton, comparable to the size of a small tree. When he strutted and kicked his legs up, it seemed that they were as high as other people were tall.

We marched about three miles down Eastern Parkway that morning. As we approached each section of spectators that lined the boulevard, our unit received a lot of applause, whoops and hollers from the viewers.

When we passed the reviewing stand, our Sergeant Major bawled out, “Eyes right!”

All 250 sets of eyeball clicked toward the reviewing stand, as an indication of respect. The military dignitaries there saluted us. When we passed the stand, we obeyed the “eyes forward” command as we resumed our regular gait.

At that moment a feeling of mixed patriotism and pride swelled over me. I knew that I stood out from, but was part of, a sea of black faces – my comrades – all sharing the American existence. I was elated to be there, even though I wasn’t generally the most enthusiastic soldier you could find.

I never forgot that moment from many years ago. It summarized the way I feel about the United States. I, like all Americans, love our country. I never met anyone who didn’t. But at the top of the patriotism scale are people who grew up somewhere else and then came here. They get starry-eyed talking about



World War II soldiers on parade, and the author, Martin Stolzenberg, as a young soldier.



the freedom, opportunity and generosity of this great land. We native-born tend to give mere lip service to this notion.

Look around to see the many wonders of this country, the things we should rightly be proud of. We are the most diverse country in the world with the most foreign-born citizens, the refuge of people from other lands. We have the best universities in the world, sought out by young people around the world. We are the world leader in medical advances and the most generous individuals in giving and helping the less fortunate. We are innovative and creative, reflected in our world’s-highest Gross Domestic Product and the proliferation of our products around the world.

But then we are reminded of everything that is wrong or, *It ain’t what it used to be*, as they say. Negatives can be seen by contrasting the United States with 20 other advanced democracies, according to the *Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development* rankings culled by Orion Magazine. When comparing the United States to other developed countries like France, UK, Germany, Canada and the Nordic countries, we now have the dubious distinction of having the highest poverty rate, the greatest inequality of incomes, the lowest social mobility, the worst score on the UN’s Gender Inequality Index, the lowest levels of wellness on many key measures (despite the highest expenditure on health care as a percent of GDP), the highest per capita carbon dioxide emissions and water consumption, among the lowest

national spending on international development and humanitarian assistance as a percentage of income, the highest homicide rate and the largest prison population in both absolute terms and per capita.

Back in the 1950s through the 1970s we were at the “top of the heap.” Much of Europe and Asia had been devastated by World War II. Countries raced to rebuild with new, modern techniques and structures. Meanwhile we were resting on our laurels. Hard as it is for us to believe and accept, they have now passed us by in many respects.

### “At that moment a feeling of mixed patriotism and pride swelled over me.”

What a paradox this is. We like to believe, and politicians remind us, that the United States is an exceptional nation. We embrace being a nation of wonders. Then we are shocked to see what other data reveal. Maybe we are insular and don’t want to know what is going on in other nations. Or somehow, all the good things about our country coexist with a lot of negatives. How can it be? Which are we?

The answer is, of course, we are both. This weird situation is largely driven by a deepening gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots” in our country. Nearly 50 million, or one-in-six, members of our society live in poverty, according to Newsweek Magazine. That means we have the *highest inequality of income*, as already noted. This not only registers in terms of income data; it also carries through to indicators of health, adequate housing, general well-being, crime and children’s performance in schools. All are negatively impacted by the high percentage of low-income families in our country.

Not only that, but in recent years, Congress has been reluctant, to put it mildly, to spend money on such basics as the infrastructure of our country, the environment, medical research and social entitlement benefits. There is still plenty of money for the military, although even that has been cut back.

We did great things in the past: almost overnight created a great arsenal to win World War II; passed the Marshall Plan, which helped pull Europe out of the devastation of that war; created the GI bill, which educated millions of returning servicemen and allowed them to purchase homes; built a vast interstate highway system; put a man on the moon; and passed a series of entitlement bills that lifted up our society. It goes on and on. These were all things undertaken by our government. Our industry initiated vast developments that also improved our country.

But, that was then, and this is now. So while we have much to be proud of, we have a long way to go to restore this great country of ours, which we unabashedly love, to its pre-eminence. It’s time to pull up our britches and do it. We should all be pressuring our lawmakers at the local, state and national level to get on with it.

Yes, it means spending extra dollars to bring these things about. We have to stop being “the low-cost nation.” Remember, you get what you pay for. It likely means increased taxes, which the well-off can easily pay and still be rich. (We have the lowest taxes among developed nations.) That is the least that they can do for a country that has given them so much.

Let’s do away with the paradox that now embodies our country. We should strive to again be a shining beacon on all fronts.

## Shortsighted truancy bill

by Elizabeth "Lit" Kurtz  
Groundcover Vendor #159

Recent news reveals that the so-called "Parental Responsibility Act" gives the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services statutory authority to cut off Family Independence Program assistance if a child is chronically truant and interventions fail.

This bill is short-sighted and does not take into account the tremendous exposure to risks a family will consequently encounter. At a time when everyone should be on board with addressing the issues of child homelessness, this bill further undermines that process. To punish a family by removing its sole means of income further entrenches them in their circumstances and puts them at tremendous risks for losing everything. The food provision has little value when a family's means of food preparation is gone.

The parental responsibility act gives the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services the authority to cut off a family's assistance when a child under the age of 16 is truant. Although this will frighten some families to make a greater effort to ensure a child gets to the classroom, invariably certain children will skip school. Placing the burden solely on parents is unconscionable, especially in a world where too many parents lack the resources to keep up with the demands of school attendance.

While this bill may serve to get a child in the classroom, it does little to ensure a quality education once she is there. Rather than penalize families, the government should help them, by addressing issues surrounding the tremendous disparities within the public school systems. Even within a single school

## Cryptoquote Solution

**Never lose an opportunity of seeing anything that is beautiful, for beauty is God's handwriting.**

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

district, one child will enter an inviting classroom with a balanced curriculum, while another child is forced to attend a school with leaking ceilings, gang presence, even rodents. Children would be better served if the government threw its weight behind such issues as stronger anti-bullying laws, consistent disciplinary plans, and administrator and teacher training around the issues which promote awareness of the unique differences in children's learning styles and – even more importantly – economic challenges.

At the core of this bill are the funds that a school system will miss out on when a child is truant. The per-pupil count is crucial for a district's survival. If the government genuinely wanted to ensure the education of a child, it seems that it would focus on parents' right to provide alternative education. A family's economic circumstances by no means lessen its desire to provide a child with an alternative education. While some families can gracefully make the transition from public education to homeschooling, this choice is virtually unavailable to a family where costs make it impossible to negotiate this process.

A professor of mine once described public schools as being, for the most part, a "left-brain," analytical, one-size-fits-all experience. To punish an entire family for the frustrations of a child who cannot fit neatly into this pattern is defeatist and portends serious difficulties for the entire family's future.

The full text of this article can be found on [youcantsaythatlit.weebly.com](http://youcantsaythatlit.weebly.com).

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## Black bean and corn salad



by Liz Bauman  
Groundcover Contributor

I make this colorful salad all summer long with fresh vegetables from the farmers market. Serve with melted cheese on a warm tortilla for a light, healthy meal. Also great with cheese and a spoonful of sour cream on nacho chips.

1 cob of fresh corn (boiled for 6 minutes and then removed from cob)

1 can black beans, rinsed and drained

1 green pepper, seeded and diced

2 tomatoes, seeded and diced

1 avocado

2 jalapeno chilies, seeded and finely diced

1/3 cup minced fresh cilantro

1/2 cup diced red onion

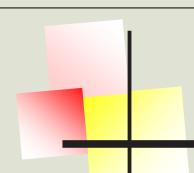
1 teaspoon ground cumin

1/4 teaspoon salt

### Directions:

Combine ingredients, sprinkle with 1 tablespoon lime juice and chill.

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WASHTENAW AREA OF MICHIGAN**



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